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CIA Estimate of Soviet Military Budget Cut

By DAVID WOOD, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency has issued a reassessment of Soviet defense spending that indicates that, during the late 1970s, it grew at only half the rate previously estimated by the Defense Department and that Soviet production of military hardware hardly increased at all.

The CIA, in a report released Friday by the Congressional Joint Economic Committee, said that on the basis of "new information" it had revised its previous estimate that Soviet defense spending had risen about 4% a year between 1976 and 1981. The new estimate, the CIA said, indicates a 2% annual increase.

Furthermore, preliminary estimates for 1982 indicate that Soviet military spending is still growing at the slower rate even when measured in constant 1970 prices, the report added.

Nevertheless, according to the CIA analysis and the Pentagon's own Soviet specialists, the level of Soviet defense spending has been so high for so long that, even with a slowdown, it is well above that of the United States. They estimate that in 1981, for example, the Soviet Union spent 45% more than the United States on both new weapons systems and on all defense activities.

According to the CIA analysis, the Soviets also spend a much greater percentage of their gross national product on defense—be-

tween 13% and 14%, compared to the United States' 6.5% of its GNP.

Although the CIA analysts did not detail the reasons for their revised estimate, they said the Soviet Union did not field as many major new weapons—including missiles, aircraft and ships—in the latter part of the 1970s as at the beginning of the decade. They said the "continued slow growth" of Soviet military power appeared to be caused by a combination of manufacturing bottlenecks, technological problems and unexplained "policy decisions."

Since 1975, according to Pentagon figures, the Soviet Union has out-built the United States 2,000 to 350 in ballistic missiles, 54,000 to 11,000 in tanks and other armored vehicles, 6,000 to 3,000 in tactical combat aircraft, 85 to 72 in surface warships and 61 to 27 in attack submarines.

However, the CIA's new estimate differed sharply with the Pentagon's view of the Soviet military buildup, which Defense Department officials have characterized as continuing to grow at a high rate. Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger repeatedly has sought to justify increases in the defense budget on the basis of similar increases in Soviet spending.

Weinberger, appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee last February to fend off proposed cuts in the budget, declared that the United States "simply cannot wait to restore our military strength—

we must do it now, this year, in this budget. . . ."

The Defense Intelligence Agency, which produces its own estimates of Soviet defense spending for the Pentagon, reportedly disagrees with the new CIA estimate. However, a Defense Intelligence spokesman said Friday that the agency would not be ready to respond to the CIA report until next week.